

‘The ordered behaviour of the individual himself’: Cecil Cook’s biological politics

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Abstract: By examining the thinking of a major public health bureaucrat, Dr Cecil Cook, this article contributes to our understanding of the relationship between racial thought and liberalism in Australia’s administration of ‘Aboriginal affairs’. In Cook’s appraisal of the health problems of northern Australia, 2 kinds of distinction were significant: racial (whites, ‘Asiatics’, Aborigines) and capacity for hygienic living. We argue that over the span of Cook’s career as an administrator and commentator (1925–69) distinctions of capacity were more fundamental, for he assumed that both whites and ‘Aborigines’ could be brought to standards of conduct required of a healthy population. We review Cook’s ideas about what made the Northern Territory different from the 6 states and about the potential of miscegenation and ‘absorption’. We argue that Cook’s nationalism was not simply ‘ethnic’ but also significantly ‘civic’ and that he was fundamentally a liberal assimilationist, albeit cautious and at times coercive in his application of public health ideas to the program of civic equality. In the course of our argument, we comment on other historians’ conceptions of Cook.

It is common to express distaste for the personality, outlook and policies of Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory from 1927 to 1939. Under his authority, ‘half-caste’¹ children were

1 A note on language: Readers are advised that this article contains descriptive terms for Aboriginal people that were commonly used in the twentieth century. This racial terminology, offensive to contemporary readers, is reproduced here as it is given in the historical record, used only in order to accurately describe Cook’s thought, and that of his times.

removed from native camps to institutions; he permitted or blocked the marital choices of 'half-caste' women. His phrase 'breed out the colour' has come to signify objectionable ways that White Australia handled the so-called 'Aboriginal problem'. Cook has come to personify ideologies, policies and practices of government that seem at best misguided and at worst cruel and racist. However, to evaluate Cook's policies and advice we need a more accurate description of these than some of our leading historians have provided. Histories of Australia's colonial practices – perhaps prompted by empathy for the pain and loss suffered by Aboriginal Australians – include much inaccurate and tendentious writing about Cook's ideas and practices. Without seeking to justify Cook's thoughts and actions, we re-present Cook as a certain kind of architect of the settler colonial state – that is, as a public health technocrat preoccupied by the central problem of liberal governance – the role of human agency (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in governing.²

After leaving his positions as Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory in 1939, Cook served in the Australian Army, working on tropical hygiene. After the war, he worked for the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments. Throughout his career, Aboriginal health and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships were of great interest to him; at times, they were also his practical concern as a medical professional and administrator.

Our article proceeds as follows. First, we put Cook's professional concerns in a world historical context. We then examine Cook's ideas about Aboriginal policy in 2 periods: 1927–39 and 1950–55. Our narrative of Cook's career ends by considering his 1969 retrospect on his approach to Aboriginal affairs in which he wondered whether intervention into Aboriginal people's lives had encouraged or discouraged Aboriginal people's responsibility. Our article concludes by discussing Russell McGregor's presentation of Cook as an ethnic nationalist: we argue that Cook's nationalism was 'civic' as well as 'ethnic'. Throughout our article, we present vignettes of historians' representations of Cook's ideas and actions and through this recontextualisation aim to show the ways in which they are tendentious and inaccurate.

2 A note on the authors: Barry Leithhead is in a long-term relationship, starting after Cecil Cook's death, with Cook's daughter, Robin McIntyre, who provided access to Cook's extensive collection of professional and personal papers. Tim Rowse is one of several people invited to comment on drafts of 'A Vision for Australia's Health: Dr Cecil Cook at Work' (Leithhead, *A Vision for Australia's Health*). In the course of their conversations, Barry and Tim agreed that in the scholarly literature on Cook's work as Chief Protector of Aboriginals and Chief Medical Officer there were some misconceptions, factual errors and debatable interpretations; they decided to write a paper to comment on this literature and to present Cook's approach to Indigenous health in a longer time frame, paying attention to statements that he made after 1939. Readers should not assume that Barry and Tim agree with each other in their evaluations of Cook's policies and practices. However, this article expresses the joint view that they have arrived at about how his approach should be described.

The nineteenth-century background

Cook was a product of a nineteenth-century revolution in health. According to Osterhammel, 3 developments terminated the 'medical *ancien régime*': the ability to prevent smallpox and malaria, the rise of laboratory medicine, and the development of social reform movements focused on improving sanitation – that is, providing clean water, sewage and garbage disposal. 'The global "hygiene revolution" was one of the great breakthroughs of the nineteenth century', Osterhammel writes. 'It began after 1850 in western and northern Europe and has continued down to the present day.' He goes on to refer to a 'decisive innovation' in government: 'the creation of local health authorities under central control but with the leeway to respond to conditions in the area'.³

Cook's professional life as a doctor and public servant from the early 1920s to 1962 exemplifies 2 elements of the social imagination of public health governance: seeing the human as a problematic agent and believing in the capacities of individuals and communities, if properly instructed, to be sanitary and well-nourished. One of Cook's early patrons, the founding director-general of the Commonwealth Department of Health Dr J. H. L. Cumpston, stated in a 1919 address 'The Nationalization of Medicine' that:

The individual man as an animal – the body in all its parts, the senses and their functioning, the nutrition of the body, its growth and development, its powers of resistance – must receive practical consideration. Nor is the individual, taken at any one moment, the whole of the issue. There is his life history, his heredity, his family, his domestic life, his personal habits, his home as well as his workshop. In short, preventive medicine must deal with the man, the whole man, as an individual as well as a member of the community.⁴

Cook considered Northern Territory society in terms of 2 distinctions: racial (the 'white', the 'Asiatic' and the 'Aboriginal' populations, and, within the 'Aboriginal', the 'half-castes', 'quadroons' and 'full-bloods') and behavioural (the hygienically competent from the hygienically incompetent). We will argue that the behavioural distinction was of greater long-term significance in Cook's thought than the racial.

Medical surveillance and Aboriginal protection overlapped functionally, as Cook pointed out in his survey of leprosy: 'it is impossible in the Northern Territory to conduct a hygiene campaign without arrogating to the Hygienist many of the functions of a Protector'.⁵ Again, in 1929: 'the function of Aboriginal protection is a medical preserve'.⁶ In Cook's public health perspective, Aboriginal people were

3 Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 195–96.

4 Roe, 'The Establishment of the Australian Department of Health', 186.

5 Cecil Cook, Report on the Joint Leprosarium in Darwin, [1925?], NAA A659, 1944/1/657.

6 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Government Resident, Darwin, 1 March 1929, NAA A431, 1946/3026.

not only healthy or unhealthy bodies, but also agents whose educable behaviour mattered to population health. From this perspective, the 'race' of a person was less important than their conduct: he believed that any person could be trained in sanitation. The Aboriginal people on whose conduct he focused in the 1930s were those classified as 'half-castes', but he was aware that eventually the state would have to consider the conduct of the wider 'Aboriginal' (or 'full-blood') population then predominantly under mission management. His advice, by the mid-1950s, was that the state must forge a more inclusive social contract in the north; through assimilation, Aboriginal people would internalise their responsibility for hygiene and nutrition and function as equal citizens. Cook's aspiration for Indigenous Australians was that they progress from a way of life that, under the impact of colonisation, had recently become insanitary to a way of life sustained by acquired competence in personal and communal hygiene.

Some historians have suggested that Cook's policies and his administration of Commonwealth policies were intended to extinguish the Aboriginal way of life and even the very existence of Aboriginal people. Discussing Cook's 'biopolitics', Samia Hossain writes that 'Cook's project to make the white race live in the tropics coincided at times with letting Aboriginal people die'.⁷ She does not explain what she means by 'let ... die', and she does not discuss the significance of 'coincides'. Gregory Smithers writes that Cook sought knowledge 'about the (interracial) sexual practices of Aboriginal women' and that he hoped 'to use that knowledge to control their reproductive lives so that Aboriginality could be eliminated'.⁸ Smithers does not point to any primary source confirming that Cook wanted to know 'sexual practices' and confirming that he thought that such knowledge would enable him to 'control their reproductive lives'. Smithers does not explain what he means by the phrase 'Aboriginality could be eliminated'. Certainly, Cook was sure that the Aboriginal way of life was rapidly disintegrating under the impact of colonial occupation; his repeatedly stated hope was that colonial authorities could reform Aboriginal people so that they could function as members of Australian society. Historians using terms such as 'die', 'eliminate' and 'erase' should be careful to distinguish the termination of life from changes in way of life and identity. Ben Silverstein does not. Coining the phrase 'Cook's eliminationist necropolitics', he asserts that 'Cook ... pursued a course of action engineered to make white life and let Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal societies, die'.⁹ He refers to Cook's 'unwillingness to contemplate the survival of Aboriginal communities', and he writes that Cook was 'celebrating Aboriginal demise'.¹⁰ We contend that Hossain, Smithers and Silverstein blur the

7 Hossain, 'Norman Haire and Cecil Cook', 460.

8 Smithers, *Science, Sexuality, and Race*, 334.

9 Silverstein, *Governing Natives*, 142, 110.

10 Silverstein, *Governing Natives*, 117, 124.

distinction between promoting change in the Aboriginal way of life and seeking to ‘eliminate’ physically those who sought adaptive continuity and did not easily embrace the changes thrust upon them.

The Northern Territory is not Queensland

To commit to the health of north Australia, Cook advised, the Commonwealth should consider the unusual features of the Northern Territory and not emulate Aboriginal policies of the states.¹¹ Shortly after Cook’s appointment, in 1928, the Commonwealth sought advice on the Northern Territory from Queensland’s Chief Protector J. W. Bleakley.¹² Bleakley was sceptical of the possibility and benefit of ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory marrying white people, though he did not recommend that the Commonwealth forbid it.¹³ Cook’s view of miscegenation was more positive; in March 1929 he responded to Bleakley by explaining to the Government Resident in Darwin why the policies of Queensland should not be models for the Kimberley and in the Northern Territory:

Whereas in Queensland and the greater part of Western Australia the Chief Protector is concerned in caring for the occasional Aboriginal in a country wholly under White civilisation, in the Territory and in the Kimberley district of Western Australia the process is one of regulating inter-racial relationships in a country where the native remains predominant and the White is an occasional settler.¹⁴

Under the heading ‘Care for the hybrid’, Cook wrote that:

In Queensland the halfcaste has been treated as an Aboriginal and left to his fate among the remnants of his tribal ancestors. In North and Central Australia an effort has been made to save the white element in his constitution from further dilution and to educate him to the standard of citizenship.¹⁵

Warning against neglect of the potential of ‘half-castes’, Cook also criticised what Bleakley said about the ‘quadroon’. ‘The cross breed with a preponderance of white blood’ whose increase was ‘deplorable’ should be raised in ‘European institutions’ from an early age, Bleakley wrote, ‘for absorption into the white population after vocational training’.¹⁶ Cook explained to his superiors that Darwin’s female

11 On 1 March 1927, the Commonwealth Government proclaimed the Northern Territory as 2 administrations – North Australia and Central Australia, each with a Resident as its senior public servant. The 2 administrations were rejoined in 1931. We have referred to the 2 administrations as ‘the Northern Territory’ when it is relevant to do so.

12 Commonwealth of Australia, *The Aboriginals and Half-Castes*.

13 Commonwealth of Australia, *The Aboriginals and Half-Castes*, 27–29.

14 Cook, Memorandum to Government Resident, Darwin, 1 March 1929.

15 Cook, Memorandum to Government Resident, Darwin, 1 March 1929.

16 Commonwealth of Australia, *The Aboriginals and Half-Castes*, 28–29.

‘quadroons’ were already under supervision at the Sisters of Mercy at Darwin’s Convent of our Lady of the Sacred Heart and that his strategy included guidance of such young women. He then compared North Australia to Queensland:

It is not true of North Australia that the ‘civilised’ half-caste reverts to the Black. On the contrary the men, with few exceptions choose their wives from amongst half-caste girls, whilst the girls marry either whites or half-castes. In Queensland this may not be true, for there no effort to improve the half-castes has ever been made, and they are brought up with the Aboriginals.¹⁷

What made the Commonwealth’s investment in the ‘half-caste’ necessary, Cook argued, was that the ‘half-caste’ population was growing much faster than white natural increase, so that ‘half-castes’ would equal or exceed whites in the foreseeable future. If the wage rates of ‘half-castes’ were kept below the rates paid to whites, Cook argued, they would displace white employees, stimulating tension and encouraging white exodus, so that the Northern Territory would fail as a region of *white* settlement.¹⁸ The best way to protect white employment and racial harmony, he argued, was to employ ‘half-castes’ on conditions equal to whites. For this, ‘half-castes’ must be enabled by government to be socially equal to whites. This was one reason for Cook’s continuing a practice that was established by the time he took office: removal of ‘half-caste’ children from native camps so that they could be raised in government institutions to become employable citizens.

Demonising Cook

As we noted in our introduction, criticism of past policies towards Indigenous Australians – particularly child removal – has encouraged distaste for the personality, outlook, practices and policies of individuals (such as Cook) who implemented policies that are now widely seen as at best misguided and at worst (in Robert Manne’s judgement) genocidal.¹⁹ Criticism of Cook’s policies and programs manifests in some historians’ characterisations of Cook as inhumane in his person. According to Andrew Markus, Cook was an ‘almost obsessive’ scientist insensitive to the human dimensions of health problems and naive about the reach of his authority. Markus writes that in Cook’s ‘ideal’ administration ‘the physiological took precedence over

17 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Government Resident, 11 June 1929, NAA A431, 1946/3026.

18 Moran characterises this projection as ‘paranoia’, which means ‘a mental condition characterized by delusions of persecution, unwarranted jealousy, or exaggerated self-importance’. He offers no evidence that Cook suffered from this condition. Moran, ‘White Australia’, fn 6.

19 Manne, *In Denial*, 39; Manne, ‘Aboriginal Child Removal’, 228–31, 238. The work of Tony Austin is a notable exception. He compares Cook’s approach to ‘half-castes’ to prevailing popular, scientific, governmental opinion between the 2 world wars and declares him ‘remarkably progressive’, though in his methods ‘an extremist among progressivists’. Austin adds that his approach was ‘not understood in the southern states and was resented in the north’. Austin, ‘Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and Half-Castes’, 119–20. See also Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home*.

the psychological’.²⁰ Keith Windschuttle presents Cook as ‘an authoritarian official who never questioned his right to act without consulting his charges’.²¹ Noting that some of Cook’s contemporaries characterised him as a ‘crank’, Windschuttle says that they were ‘probably very close to the truth’.²² Warwick Anderson implies a comparison with Nazi administrators. Describing as a ‘scientific breeding program’ Cook’s supervision of ‘half-caste’ women’s choice of spouse, Anderson remarks: ‘In Germany in the 1930s, these girls might have been regarded as undesirables and therefore sterilised; in Australia, however, they were to be absorbed, in order to produce a biologically consolidated nation’.²³ This sentence states a fact and then a counterfactual. The fact is that the women under Cook’s authority were not sterilised (has anyone ever suggested that they were?). The counterfactual is that the girls might have lived in Germany, not the Northern Territory, in the 1930s, in which case they might have been judged ‘undesirable’ (on racial grounds) and sterilised. What is the point of Anderson’s counterfactual? There is a suggestion that Cook and the Nazis can be placed within a spectrum of state eugenic programs and compared.²⁴ However, Anderson does not pursue this comparison; he merely hints an analogy between the Nazi-persecuted and ‘half-caste’ women under Cook’s supervision. Insinuation is no argument.

‘Breed out the colour’

Cook’s instruments for advancing ‘half-castes’ included continuing the Kahlin Compound (established in 1913) as a place of training in sanitary, communal living. As well, he initiated a small housing program, and he entitled ‘half-caste’ employees to medical insurance and to regulation of apprentice employment.²⁵ By far the most controversial of his interventions was Cook’s say over Aboriginal women’s marital choice. In 1933 Cook referred to his approach to marriage surveillance by the phrase ‘breed out the colour’. On 7 February 1933, he spelled out how he was using his powers under the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918* (Cth) to influence Aboriginal reproduction in the Northern Territory: [‘full-blood’] Aborigines to ‘mate’ only with other [‘full-blood’] Aborigines; prohibit ‘mating’ between Aborigines (both ‘full-bloods’ and ‘half-castes’) and non-Aboriginal coloured persons; encourage marriage of vetted ‘half-castes’ to vetted whites and ‘half-castes’. Referring to the

20 Markus, *Governing Savages*, 100–01.

21 Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Australian History*, Vol. 3, 366.

22 Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Australian History*, Vol. 3, 398.

23 Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 236. Anderson was followed by Gray, *Brass Discs*, 72: Cook’s policy ‘raises the spectre of forced sterilisation and internment camps. Fortunately Australian official policy never quite reached this point’.

24 For a discussion of whether and how we should position the Australian advocates of miscegenation (such as Cook) within the tradition of ‘eugenics’ in which the Nazis figure so horribly, see McGregor, “‘Breed Out the Colour’”, 297–99.

25 Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home*, 135–42, 155–93.

third point, Cook wrote: 'Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population'. J. A. Carrodus, the secretary of the Department of the Interior, used 'breed out the colour' when briefing his minister on Cook's use of his authority.²⁶ After Cook's policy, represented by this phrase, was made public in the *Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory up to June 30 1933* (in which Cook referred to the 'half-caste coloured aliens' population as a 'perennial economic and social problem'), the Melbourne *Herald* quoted the phrase 'breed out the colour' in a short news item (based on the *Report*) on 29 June 1934.²⁷

'Breed out the colour' features prominently in accounts of Cook's work in the Northern Territory – a much recruited fact.²⁸ The phrase has become notorious for the racist implication that 'black' is bad and 'white' is good and for the authoritarian premise that governments had the right to take control over peoples' most intimate behaviour, their 'breeding'. Distaste for the idea that humans can be 'bred' as if they were animals has led some historians to present Cook's marriage power in the most negative terms. Markus refers to Cook's miscegenation policy as 'Cook's breeding program'.²⁹ Robert Manne writes that Cook's policy was based on 'thinking of a genocidal kind'; in another essay, Manne uses the subheading 'Dr. Cecil Cook: Breeding Out the Colour' and argues that his thoughts and plans about 'absorption' were 'genocidal', but (fortunately) difficult to implement.³⁰ Stephen Gray erroneously refers to 'the Chief Protector's arranged marriages'.³¹

It was controversial, at this time, for an Australian government to countenance and even to encourage white Australian men to marry and raise children with women of colour. In June 1933, W. E. H. Stanner, a graduate student of anthropology at the University of Sydney, advised against miscegenation. While 'hybrids are not necessarily inferior' and while 'frequently they are superior to the parental stocks', it was risky to encourage or allow 'hybrids' to produce children with whites because some of their progeny would be dark-skinned and they would be stigmatised by their appearance. Because science was still ignorant of the genetics of Aboriginal hybridisation it was not possible to predict the frequency of such 'throw-backs' (children of darker hue than their coloured parent) and so miscegenation was

26 J. A. Carrodus, Letter to Secretary Department of Prime Minister, 25 May 1933, NAA A659, 1940/1/408.

27 'Half-Caste Aliens in North "Grave Problem"', *Herald* (Melbourne), 29 June 1934, 1. As Conon points out, Cook and others judged that Asian/Aboriginal unions had 'none of the perceived benefits of assimilation'. Conon, *Skin Deep*, 308.

28 Carr, *What Is History?*, 6–8.

29 Markus, *Governing Savages*, 93.

30 Manne, *In Denial*, 39; Manne, 'Aboriginal Child Removal', 228–31, 238.

31 Gray, *Brass Discs*, 71. Windschuttle (*The Fabrication of Australian History*, Vol. 3, 388–98) critically discusses the allegation, made in 1933, that Cook was 'arranging' marriages by offering employment as an inducement to white spouses.

an 'experiment with lives'.³² A week later, Stanner wrote that miscegenation was 'a blunder'. He observed that prevailing prejudice against 'half-castes' meant that most men who would marry a 'half-caste' woman would be 'poor whites, inferior or "failed" types'. He wished it were otherwise: 'A very different story might be told if above-average whites married above-average native women and if the children were not stigmatised or otherwise penalised'.³³

Anti-racism can be seen as a field of possible positions, so let us compare Stanner's with Cook's. Stanner rejected miscegenation from the standpoint of a critic of colour prejudice. Before miscegenation could be ventured, he argued, 'a radical revision of the general public attitude towards mixed-bloods' would be necessary ... [including] 'to give the hybrids complete equality of political, legal, and social status and complete equality of economic opportunity. To do less than this would be to court trouble'.³⁴ While not doubting that Stanner disliked the racial prejudice to which he urged prudent deference, we see Cook's anti-racism as less prudent: he was prepared to accept the risk of miscegenation.³⁵ Cook pointed to the demography and morality of the Northern Territory: a surplus of female 'half-castes' was emerging, and it was desirable to manage them. That is, in Cook's assessment, a growing number of 'half-caste' women, having been trained by the government, were now too 'civilised' to marry 'boys of their own generation' who had not been removed to government institutions. These excess 'half-caste' women 'must be married to men of substantially European origin'.³⁶ Encouraging miscegenation would have the additional desirable effect of limiting cohabitation between white men and Aboriginal women – casual arrangements resulting in squalid homes, he suggested. Cook believed that 'many such men would be prepared to marry half-caste females and make decent homes'.³⁷ That is, Cook's hopes for miscegenation were not only to further the 'civilising' of Aboriginal women but also to arrest the deterioration of the morality of white men who lived within easy reach of Aboriginal camps. Cook also saw eugenic promise in miscegenation:

[A] large proportion of the half-caste female population is derived from the best white stock in the country whilst the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value – intelligence, stamina, resources,

32 William E. H. Stanner, 'Peril in Racial Crossing: Research Urged on Half-Caste Scheme', *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 18 June 1933.

33 William E. H. Stanner, 'The Problem of the Half Caste', *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 25 June 1933.

34 Stanner, 'The Problem of the Half Caste'. For more on the differences between Cook's and others' opinions about 'half-castes', see Austin, 'Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and Half-Castes'.

35 McGregor (*Imagined Destinies*, 174–75) describes Stanner's views about miscegenation, but Anderson (*The Cultivation of Whiteness*) does not. Stanner's biographers (Barwick, Beckett and Reay, 'W.E.H. Stanner'; Hinkson and Beckett, "'Going More than Half Way to Meet Them'"; Manne, 'W.E.H. Stanner') have so far omitted to work this episode into the Stanner legend.

36 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933, NAA A659, 1940/1/408.

37 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933, NAA A659, 1940/1/408.

high resistance to the influence of tropical environment and the character of pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.³⁸

If Cook's miscegenation policy was as much an attempt to 'breed' some of the characteristics of 'colour' into the Territory population, we can see that calling the practice 'breed out the colour' obscured the latitude that he was seeking in the 'White Australia' policy: his attempt to adjust the ideal of 'white' to the demography of the Northern Territory.³⁹ Cook may have calculated that his phrase 'breed out the colour' would mollify such Australians as Emily Curtis (of the Women's Section of the United Country Party) who characterised 'half-caste' women as 'of illegitimate birth, tainted with aboriginal blood, the offspring of men of the lowest human type, many of whom are Asiatics and other foreign nationalities'.⁴⁰ Addressing such fears as those Stanner had voiced only a few weeks before, Cook expressed confidence that Territorians would tolerate any offspring darker than either of their parents. Cook judged that assimilation of 'half-castes' in the Northern Territory was contingent not only on their gradual whitening by miscegenation but also on the changes in their way of life. He represented the 'half-caste' as 'exceptionally assimilable – he has no national outlook, social custom or alien background incompatible with full white citizenship'.⁴¹ His policy 'involves the granting of full citizenship to a generation of persons who may fairly claim it'.⁴² He assured the administrator that he knew of several good marriages in Darwin, whereas marriages between half-castes 'are almost without exception attended by social and economic disaster'.⁴³ His support of limited miscegenation (Asian husbands were not accepted) was complementary

38 Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933. Austin (*I Can Picture the Old Home*, 149) also draws attention to this statement of aims.

39 Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933. Cook adhered to 'White Australia' orthodoxy when it came to 'Asiatics': he would not allow 'half-caste' stock to enhance the Asian-Australian gene pool. To 'limit the multiplication of the hybrid coloured population', coloured non-Aboriginal people should be prevented from mating with the half-caste Aboriginal females whose wifely qualities he championed. Katherine Ellinghaus ('Absorbing the Aboriginal Problem') has argued that for Cook and Western Australia's Chief Protector A. O. Neville, an important purpose of the marriage power was to disallow Asian-Aboriginal unions.

40 McGregor's source is Emily Curtis, Letter to Secretary, Department of the Interior, 19 August 1934, NAA A452, 1952/420, *Imagined Destinies*, 174. Keith Windschuttle (*The Fabrication of Australian History*, Vol. 3, 383–400) has documented considerable opposition from upper levels of the Australian Government to Cook's policy in 1933–34. What he does not say is that the government's embarrassment about the perception that it was running a human breeding program would have arisen not only from perception that Cook's marriage control was an 'offence against human rights' (Vol. 3, 397) (less anachronistically, an infringement on the liberty of British subjects) but also from a popular fear and loathing of miscegenation.

41 Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933. So Cook regretted in 1969 that Aboriginal identity had come to include 'the fiction that the mixed blood is an Aboriginal' (Cook, 'Protection', 24). There is no doubt that he anticipated and welcomed the erasure of Aboriginality as an identity, at least for those of 'mixed blood'.

42 Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933. In this argument, we agree with Austin (*I Can Picture the Old Home*, 149–50) who shows that Cook's practice could better be described as 'breeding IN the colour'. Austin gives official statistics on Cook's approvals: 37 European husbands and 18 'half-caste' husbands.

43 Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 27 June 1933.

to his campaign for political support for the regulation of 'half-caste' employment (against the vigorous lobbying of pastoralists) and for a non-discriminatory medical service in Alice Springs (against white residents' preference for segregation).⁴⁴

Beyond the 'half-castes'

Cook urged the Commonwealth to plan for the Northern Territory to be a variant of White Australia, but just how long 'colour' would persist in the Northern Territory was difficult to predict, because beyond the 'half-castes' that he was able to control there was a vast hinterland of 'full-bloods' uncounted by the Census (but estimated in Cook's *Annual Reports*) – some living on 'inviolable reserves' under the supervision of missionaries, others rationed by pastoralists and others under no colonial supervision. Was the 'full-blood' population, under these conditions, rising or falling? Government officials who met in Canberra in April 1937 had no definite answer to this question.

Before describing that bewildered Canberra conversation, we review Cook's advice about the Territory's remote Aboriginal people in the years 1935–37. The 'inviolable reserve' was intended to shield Aboriginal people from all contact with non-Aboriginal people other than a few authorised whites, mostly missionaries. The Commonwealth had declared a reserve in the south-west in 1920 and a large part of Arnhem Land became an inviolable reserve in 1931; throughout the 1930s, scientists and missionaries advocated extending the south-west reserve. Cook was sceptical of inviolable reserves: was the government really protective if it abstained from intervention, he asked? In a memorandum to Minister for the Interior Thomas Paterson in 1935, Cook stated his doubts: empty spaces in the north were, in his view, a security risk, and he thought it a waste to deprive graziers, miners and others of natural resources that they could develop. Missions on existing reserves were breaking down social organisation, by Christian conversion, without training Aboriginal people in the ways of modern Australia. Cook thought that missions lacked the resources, including skilled staff, to keep people healthy. The best path forward for all Northern Territory Aboriginal people, he argued, lay through regulated employment – mostly in the pastoral industry. For those living in areas occupied by pastoral leases, Cook recommended that small reserves be declared; these could include ceremonial centres, but also sites for training in horticulture and goat/cattle herd management; children could gradually be inducted into schools.

44 Austin ('Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and Half-Castes', 116) writes that 'few matters concerning Aborigines and Half-castes generated so much heat and voluminous correspondence' as Cook's 'Apprenticeship (Half-castes) Regulations'. On medical services in Alice Springs, see NAA F1, 1938/666, which shows that in 1932, after establishing a Medical Benefits Fund for the Northern Territory whose income included payments from employers of Aboriginal people, Cook sought to use it to subsidise the Australian Inland Mission hostel in Alice Springs, provided that the hostel would service all members of the Alice Springs public, including Aboriginal members of the fund.

For those beyond white settlement Cook conceded that inviolable reserves, possibly with missions, were the best that the government could now provide. However, he urged that the government supervise missions more rigorously: the Chief Medical Officer (Cook himself) should instruct them in clinical and public health, and schools on missions should be government controlled. Fearing too rapid collapse in Aboriginal social organisation, Cook conceded that missions should sustain ceremonial life in selected respects.⁴⁵

Cook's thoughts about responsibility over the most remote Aboriginal people were further stimulated by the recommendations of an inquiry in 1935 into a policeman's fatal shooting of an Aboriginal man in custody in the vicinity of the south-west reserve. The anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow gave advice to this inquiry and was then appointed in 1936 as the Territory's first Patrol Officer. Strehlow advised Cook that the administration should set up a trading post within the south-west reserve as an incentive for the residents to remain living on it. The reserve-dwellers' desire for goods that they did not produce themselves could be satisfied if they bartered the products of their own economic activity at the trading post, Strehlow suggested. They would then be less likely to migrate to make contact with white people. Cook neither dismissed nor endorsed Strehlow's trading post proposal, arguing that it was difficult to know whether the south-west reserve really was losing its food-bearing value for Aboriginal residents. He was sceptical of Strehlow's and others' suggestion that the south-west reserve be extended north and east. Again, he drew attention to the opportunities lost if colonists could not access natural resources.⁴⁶

Cook's last statement (as Chief Protector) about how the government could take responsibility for the uncounted peoples of the remotest corners of the Northern Territory was his memorandum on missions on 2 April 1938. He questioned the morality of leaving Aboriginal people alone, without giving them the opportunity to develop the skills and outlooks required in the wider society. Cook thought that Aboriginal people had shown their preference and aptitude for the new ways. Shielding them from contact was not only difficult, but also it was a denial of their entitlement to guidance in the new way of life. As well, he added, some features of Aboriginal tradition were so repugnant ('rape', 'murder') that no civilised society should tolerate their continuation: reserves did not 'protect' the victims of these cruel customs. Cook repeated his suggestion that the remote reserves were a security risk.⁴⁷

45 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 7 October 1935, NAA A1, 1937/70.

46 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 9 March 1937, NAA F1, 1938/418.

47 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 2 April 1938, NAA F1, 1944/193 Part 1.

The significance of this series of increasingly critical comments on the inviolable reserve is that they show Cook accepting that the entire Northern Territory Aboriginal population was becoming the government's responsibility.⁴⁸ Other than proposing supervision of missions, Cook did not say how the government should intervene in remote Aboriginal lives. He had developed an array of interventions into the lives of 'half-castes', but he had few ways to influence the thousands of Aboriginal people who lived on pastoral leases, missions and reserves.⁴⁹ With little power to hold missionaries and pastoralists accountable, particularly in matters relevant to health, he could only speculate on the demography of most of the people of Aboriginal descent living in the Northern Territory. Nonetheless, when Cook met with state officials and other 'experts' in Canberra on 21–23 April 1937, he projected an increasing Aboriginal population for the Northern Territory.

Cook meets with state officials, April 1937

At the initial conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal authorities in Canberra, 21–23 April 1937, Cook began by celebrating the protection that he thought he was achieving by the means so far afforded his administration by government policy: a strategy of equality for 'half-castes', aimed at enabling a rapidly increasing 'half-caste' population to compete with whites for a limited supply of jobs. Without such a strategy, 'half-castes', denied the material benefits of the economy, might 'rise in revolt', he speculated, and there would be racial tension.⁵⁰ If 'half-castes' were enabled to compete with white labour, some would probably migrate to find work in other parts of Australia. 'That would relieve the tension in the Territory.'⁵¹ An amendment to the *Aboriginals Ordinance* in 1936 enabled him to exempt selected 'half-castes' from his control. This concession had been necessary because 'many half-castes of a superior type who have been provided with homes, for which they were paying, resented the imputation that they were a subject race, and not entitled to accompany their friends when taking refreshment'.⁵²

48 We agree with Alison Bashford's account of Cook: that 'contact between races was prevented or discouraged except under the sanctioned politics of assimilation' (Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene*, p.110). Apart from his views on leprosy prophylaxis, Cook was a critic of segregation in health servicing. The emphasis for him was 'contact' 'under the sanctioned politics of assimilation' (though Cook used the words 'adsorption' and 'absorption') not racial segregation as a general approach. Evidence of his hostility to segregation as a general policy can be found in correspondence on NAA F1, 1938/666 (see footnote 44).

49 Warwick Anderson exaggerates when he writes that under Cook's supervision of marriages 'the state would take control of Aboriginal reproduction' (Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 236). Cook made no attempt to control sexual activity among 'full-blood' Aboriginal people – the source of most 'Aboriginal reproduction' in the Northern Territory at that time.

50 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 13.

51 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 13.

52 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 21.

Cook then turned to the question of the 'Aboriginal population', the estimated 19,000 people not affected by his strategy of 'half-caste' equality. If they were 'multiplying at a rate far in excess of the whites', the government faced 3 options. To do nothing was repugnant to any 'Protector'; to protect the black population would enable it to 'swamp the white'; to follow a policy of absorption was best.⁵³ Cook did not propose how to 'absorb' a large and possibly increasing black population, and nor did the other officials. Indeed, not all experts agreed that 'protection' was causing 'full-bloods' to survive and perhaps to increase. Referring to the 'full-blood' population of Western Australia, Chief Protector A. O. Neville said: 'no matter what we do, they will die out'. The only rising population, according to Neville, was 'the coloured people of various degrees'.⁵⁴ When Cook questioned Neville's negative assessment of 'full-blood' protection, B. S. Harkness, a member of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, asked Cook: 'Do you think we should encourage them to breed?' Cook gave no answer.⁵⁵ Dissatisfied with this evasion, Professor J. B. Cleland (chairman of South Australia's Advisory Council of Aborigines and advocate of inviolable reserves) asked Cook to clarify his view on the future of 'pure-blood' Aboriginal people: should they be left 'in their present tribal conditions'? Cook answered that where tribal people were left alone, as in the Arnhem Land reserve and as Cleland recommended for the Musgrave Ranges, their population would remain 'much the same as they have been for four or five centuries'. To 'meddle with them, bring them into reservations, attempt to eradicate their bad habits, and give them a white outlook' would be to raise 'another colour problem'. He then asked: 'Are we going to do that or not?'⁵⁶

53 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 14. Cook had sometimes used the word 'adsorption' – a term used by chemists to refer to 'the process where a substance becomes part of and remains in a state mid-way between mechanical mixture and chemical combination'. Arguably, his use of 'adsorption' envisaged the retention, to some degree, of the distinct identity of people of colour within the society of northern Australia. His colleagues did not grasp this terminological nicety, and so he had abandoned it by 1937. But see Cook to Weddell, 11 December 1933, NAA A659 1943/1/5707; and Leithhead, *A Vision*, 94–95.

54 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 16.

55 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 17.

56 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 18. Cook's tactic of posing questions and sketching possible scenarios has made it difficult to pin down what he was advocating, and some historians have made questionable inferences. In *Imperial Hygiene*, Alison Bashford writes that Cook argued at this meeting that Aboriginal women 'who become sterilised by gonorrhoea at an early age ... should be left untreated' (Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene*, 109). We think it is clear from the transcript that he was not advocating non-treatment but warning that Aboriginal people 'would probably be extinct in Australia in 50 years' if governments did not provide health care to Aboriginal people – a policy of (what he called, on this occasion and later) 'laissez faire' (Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 14). Cook was urging his colleagues to face the consequences of a 'conscientious' protection policy: a rising Aboriginal population. That Cook favoured government interventions that would cause the Aboriginal population to increase has also escaped Samia Hossain who comments on Cook's 1937 words: 'Cook's rhetoric ... suggests that he anticipated, hoped and simultaneously felt uncomfortable with the knowledge that his inaction would render some "full-blooded" Aboriginal women sterile' (Hossain, 'Norman Haire and Cecil Cook', 457–58). Hossain offers no evidence that this is what Cook 'hoped'; and such a 'hope' would have been inconsistent with his record of efforts throughout his career to medicalise the management of the Aboriginal population.

Cook's colleagues did not answer that provocative question, and the entire exchange demonstrated Cook's and others' dilemma: to protect Aboriginal people was all governments' duty, but effective government (and mission) action had the possible result of maintaining and even enlarging the northern Aboriginal population. How could so many be 'absorbed', other than by generations of miscegenation, licit or illicit? Uplift and absorption through miscegenation was imaginable when the target population was relatively small, but no official was willing to say that Australian governments should promote miscegenation on the scale that would be required were the entire 'full-blood' population to be 'absorbed'. The experts did not know whether to express fear or hope for 'full-blood' proliferation – a dilemma revealed in Bleakley's choice of words when he asked Cook to produce 'more evidence ... to justify the *pessimistic view* that he expressed yesterday as to the menace of absorption of the white race by the coloured race in the Northern Territory'.⁵⁷ Bleakley then suggested that the 'full-blood' population was decreasing in the Northern Territory and that they would not be a 'menace to the white people' if the government controlled them.⁵⁸ Responding to Bleakley, Cook agreed that 'developing a coloured race ... would be a menace to the white population in the north' and that 'the policy which this Conference has adopted, may have just that result'.⁵⁹ However, he soon explained that the 'menace' was not only what blacks might do to whites but also what whites might do to blacks. He referred to reports of whites lynching blacks in the United States:

There is at present no evidence of any such attitude towards the coloured people in Australia, for in this country the aboriginal native is regarded with contemptuous tolerance. But when he has been elevated to a position almost equal to that of a white, conflict may be expected unless that stage is reached only after enlightened development.⁶⁰

But what was 'enlightened development'?

Cook's public health liberalism, 1950–55

When Interior Minister John McEwen decided in 1939 to separate the 'health' and 'Aboriginal' administrations in the Northern Territory, Cook's unpublished objections were apparently so vigorous that the Commonwealth relieved Cook of his Northern Territory responsibilities. So Cook did not have the opportunity

57 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 19, emphasis added. Note that this was Bleakley inferring 'pessimism'; the published record supports the inference that Cook considered 'full-blood' survival desirable as long as governments found ways to manage their entry into modern Australian ways of life, and his memoranda in the 1930s outlined how this could be done.

58 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 19.

59 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 34.

60 Cook in Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 34–35.

to be part of the experiment in 'enlightened development' that war mobilisation occasioned.⁶¹ The Second World War obliged the Commonwealth to draw remote Aboriginal people into military 'native labour' camps; these new interventions aroused confidence in remote Aboriginal people's educability.

Cook returned to the questions of social change in northern Australia after the war as a senior public servant in Western Australia (1946–49) and then in the Commonwealth Department of Health (1950–62). His 1951 report 'Health Problems in Northern Australia' reflected on the possible reformation of colonial authority in the north. Sticking to his conviction that 'the function of Aboriginal Protection is a medical preserve' (his words in 1929), he argued that how Aboriginal people would now interact with non-Aboriginal authorities would be a major determinant of health in northern Australia.

Characteristically, Cook began with socio-demographic description: 'the Northern Territory, the Peninsula and Gulf Divisions of Queensland and the Kimberley Division of Western Australia' were 'sparsely settled by a white population of low natural increase, a substantial and rapidly increasing mixed blood and a larger but diminishing native population'.⁶² Most Aboriginal people, he wrote, lived in squalor on the fringes of towns and in unhygienic missions and settlements. Cook asserted that Aboriginal people were ill-served by their protectors, receiving little training in hygienic living, in work discipline, in thrift, in respect for property and in food preparation. As well, the decoupling of protection and medical surveillance in the Territory since 1939 meant that a large minority avoided medical surveillance. He saw loss of nerve and low expectations among many whites in authority, and he worried that the Aboriginal population was a risk to itself and to white Australians who might migrate to the tropics. Cook urged governments to devote more resources, and he called for greater commitment by mission and settlement staff. In particular, Cook wanted authorities to win Aboriginal people's acceptance of systematic medical surveillance, to build the knowledge base of legitimate regulation of infective persons.⁶³

Cook saw the 'mixed-blood' people in the Kimberley and the Northern Territory as continuing to develop along a distinct path, with rising expectations that they be treated as whites' equals. Noting the availability of legal exemption of 'half-castes' in

61 A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone mistakenly refer to the transfer of Cook to the University of Sydney (School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine) as his 'retirement' (Moses and Stone, 'Eugenics and Genocide', 199) – a mistake that discourages attention to underlying themes in Cook's public service advocacy of population health over the period 1925–69.

62 Cecil Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', June–July 1951, AIATSIS Library, 1–2. He did not justify his use of the word 'diminishing', nor did he say how quickly this was happening; the rest of his report assumes that northern Australia would continue to have a substantial Aboriginal population. His words were thus typical of a tradition of official commentary on Aboriginal demography until the late 1960s: cavalier, confused and poor in data. See Rowse, *Indigenous and Other Australians*, 134–46.

63 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 6–7.

all 3 northern jurisdictions (since Western Australia's *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944*), Cook worried that people of mixed descent were being liberated prematurely from supervision. He spelled out 2 criteria for exemption: Aboriginal people must live at a standard equivalent to the 'generality of the white population'; and the wider community must be willing to interact with those exempted.⁶⁴ Cook observed that 'in few instances has the more self-respecting element of the white community suffered the halfcaste's complete integration into white society'.⁶⁵ Indeed, he admitted to his own reservations about the capacities of the exempt, recommending that 'the benevolent surveillance of Government' continue.⁶⁶ Acknowledging that this could arouse resentment among 'half-castes', he suggested that governments spell out the rights and obligations of the exempt and develop 'a system of mutual aid and co-operation in groups influenced and, if necessary, subsidised by Government'. To avert the capture of these groups by communist agents and to allay suspicion of bureaucratic direction these groups 'should be developed as Church societies'.⁶⁷

It is not a surprising result of Cook's 'strategy of equality' that those most changed by it should be foremost in questioning its continuing intrusion. Cook had been aware of 'half-caste' aspiration in the 1930s, when he was obliged in 1936 to accept the 'exemption' provision in the *Aboriginals Ordinance*. In 1937, discussing the supply of liquor and drugs to Aboriginal people, Cook had admitted: 'For some time I opposed the [exemption] amendment, but as the then existing ordinance tended to make them regard the Chief Protector as an enemy rather than as a friend, I agreed to it'.⁶⁸ His 1951 report continued to be preoccupied with the disposition of 'half-castes' towards governments' commitment 'to aid and guide' them.⁶⁹

Cook made explicit this political dimension of population health in a 1955 paper 'Health and the Labour Force in the Northern Territory'. 'Co-operation between the individual native and the health authority ... can only be expected in a thoroughly enlightened and well disposed people'.⁷⁰ Essential to health in the north was an Aboriginal person with 'a full consciousness and acknowledgment of his responsibilities to the community'.⁷¹ To cultivate responsibility, a government should not only impart knowledge but also solicit good will by conceding civic equality. After classifying the illnesses of the Aboriginal population as 'communicable' (infections) and 'deficiency' (nutrition-based), Cook commented:

64 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 28.

65 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 26.

66 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 29.

67 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 29.

68 Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 22.

69 Cook, 'Health Problems in Northern Australia', 29.

70 Cook, 'Native Health and the Labour Force', 80.

71 Cook, 'Native Health and the Labour Force', 80.

None of the diseases of either group is susceptible of complete control except by the ordered behaviour of the individual himself. The time when prevention could be attempted by restraint imposed upon his person is already past. There is now no alternative to training of the native individually and collectively in the measures of prevention he must himself apply, developing in him at the same time a full consciousness and acknowledgment of his responsibilities to the community.⁷²

Authority wielded without:

enlightenment and courage ... may lead to reluctance in the native to undertake responsibility in a community in which he enjoys no full measure of the privileges ... [and so] he is entitled to expect and to receive the privileges of citizenship in their entirety ...⁷³

Thus, by 1955, Cook was promoting assimilation as a social contract mandated by the imperatives of population health. The good health of northern Australia was becoming inconceivable to him, except on the basis of an emerging civic equality between black and white. We should note the unsentimental terms of his advocacy. The social contract that he sought was 'no charity prompted by quixotic benevolence' he assured his audience in 1955, nor was it 'a compassionate impulse to redress past wrongs, real or imaginary. It is an insurance premium inexorably demanded of us by self-interest, importunate and unashamed'.⁷⁴

While Cook was conceding increased responsibilities to Indigenous Australians his belief in firm government intervention into Aboriginal lives persisted, in the 1950s, in his advocacy of the isolation of lepers. Charmaine Robson has traced the views of the Committee on Tropical Physiology and Hygiene (CTPH, convened by the National Health and Medical Research Council) about the criteria for judging whether a patient could be discharged from isolation after treatment:

Patients had to have access to a medical practitioner for regular reviews and the means to continue their treatment, a fixed address, 'separate accommodation and utensils, an adequate diet and no domiciliary contact with children'. If the patient had a physical disability, nursing and other support 'to preserve him from hardship, starvation or other factors lowering resistance' was required.⁷⁵

72 Cook, 'Native Health and the Labour Force', 80.

73 Cook, 'Native Health and the Labour Force', 80.

74 Cook, 'Native Health and the Labour Force', 80.

75 Robson, 'Ending Isolation?', 72, quoting from CTPH documents.

In a section defining the cases warranting isolation, the CTPH added what Robson calls a 'more explicit layer of restrictions on Indigenous patients': to justify isolation of a 'European patient', the clinician should have both bacteriological and clinical evidence, but for 'native full-bloods' a clinician needed to be satisfied only that the presenting symptoms were 'clinically suggestive' of the disease.⁷⁶

The question to consider here is the relationship between medical authorities' use of racial classification and their judgement about a patient's 'responsibility'. Both were in play for the CTPH, according to Robson: 'Decisions respecting another racial category, "native mixed bloods", depended on the extent to which the individual's way of life resembled that of a "full-blood" or "European"'.⁷⁷ While Alison Bashford sees Cook as exemplifying 'a trend towards more strongly and explicitly racialized practices of segregation' in Australia's twentieth-century management of leprosy, she also writes: 'The discussion [about what categories of sufferers should be confined] increasingly turned on questions of responsibility, on questions of capacity for responsible self-government'.⁷⁸

There is no doubt that in his 1927 report on the epidemiology of leprosy Cook considered Aboriginal people incapable of 'responsible self-government'. Suspected white cases could be placed under compulsory home isolation, obliged to report for re-examination and treatment until a positive result warranted their admission to a lazaret, but suspected Aboriginal cases were to be kept in a lazaret 'without recourse to a bacteriological examination'. The difference? Whites 'can be relied upon to report regularly and faithfully to carry out instructions', whereas Aborigines must be under restraint because their 'careless and irresponsible habits render it impossible to keep him under observation, or to submit him to a course of treatment unless he is under restraint'.⁷⁹ While we agree with Bashford and Robson that Cook persisted in his belief that isolation of Aboriginal patients was essential to leprosy prophylaxis, we argue that for Cook, as for Cumpston, the primary consideration was not the patient's race but his/her perceived capacity for self-care. The circumstances of remote Aboriginal life continued, in Cook's view, to make their self-care unlikely. In 1952, he observed that:

With the concentration of native children on missions, the attendant demolition of intertribal barriers, the uncontrolled herding of the infected and the susceptible under unhygienic conditions, and the debilitation of

76 Robson, 'Ending Isolation?', 72.

77 Robson, 'Ending Isolation?', 72 quoting from CTPH documents.

78 Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene*, 99. As evidence, she quotes not Cook but J. H. L. Cumpston's *Health and Disease in Australia: A History*, written in 1928, but not published until 1989. Cumpston thought highly of Cook's research on leprosy (Cook, *Epidemiology of Leprosy in Australia*), as he revealed in his Preface to Cook's *Epidemiology*. Note that in the passage quoted by Bashford Cumpston includes 'indigent and feeble-minded Europeans' among those who should be confined – a distinction based on judged capability, not 'race'.

79 Cook, *Epidemiology of Leprosy in Australia*, 298.

the natives by imported infections and defective diet, leprosy in aborigines had increased in incidence alarmingly and had become largely a disease of children and adolescents.⁸⁰

For Cook, in the 1950s, it followed that authorities should not base their leprosy control policy on recent clinical innovations that increasingly obviated confinement of the infected: the spread of leprosy was best prevented by continuing the isolation policies initiated in the 1890s and endorsed by Cook in 1927.

Looking back on protection in 1969

In 1969, officers of the South Australian Museum convened a symposium on 'Current problems of Aborigines', under the auspices of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, and they invited Cook to speak. 'Black Power' theory and practice was then challenging all experts to review Australia's 'Aboriginal welfare' record from a human rights perspective, and Cook took the opportunity to say how he considered human rights to apply. In the 1955 address quoted above, he had used the phrase 'wrongs, real or imaginary' – a hint of scepticism towards critical accounts of colonial authority. In his 1969 address, he saw no reason to regret or to apologise for colonisation. Both sides had behaved violently, but colonial authority had manifested 'enduring European goodwill'.⁸¹ He offered his ambivalent review of the purposes, instruments and effects of 'European good will' as he and others had embodied it. On the one hand, he thought the human rights critique of paternalism to be misconceived: 'the principles of human rights as we profess them today' were illustrated by negligent government in nineteenth-century South Australia, resulting in 'the Aboriginal's accelerating progress toward depravity, degradation and extinction'.⁸² On the other hand, Cook conceded that protective controls over movement were 'open to criticism as a gross infringement of human rights' insofar as governments had used them for too long and had applied them to the wrong people.⁸³ He argued that the inviolable reserve ('the Australian form of "apartheid"') had been a failed experiment, restricting people's movement and learning. He also objected to policies that had blocked 'the social integration of the mixed-blood into the "white" community', and he celebrated what he saw as the success of the opposite approach taken, under his authority, in the Northern Territory. If some people of mixed descent were now (in 1969) calling themselves 'Aboriginal', it was partly because governments had done too little to extricate them from fringe-dwelling and to encourage them to identify with white Australians.

80 Cook, 'Remarks to Symposium on Leprosy', 568.

81 Cook, 'Protection', 16.

82 Cook, 'Protection', 18.

83 Cook, 'Protection', 19–20.

'This outcome appears to have been avoided in the north by closer attention to the circumstances of the individual, and the progressive relaxation of restraints as his adaptation progressed.'⁸⁴

Cook acknowledged the difficulty of devising interventions that were not excessive. Much 'protection' had:

reared the Aboriginal in a world of unreality, denying him opportunities for progress and frustrating his adaptation by sparing him the responsibility of decision and sheltering him from the consequences of error. Embodied in acts and regulations, these measures of protection acquired the sanctity and permanence of law. Administered by a Public Service seized with the importance of precedent, unresponsive to change and rigid in interpretation, they soon became outmoded in a rapidly changing environment ... creating abuses instead of remedying them.⁸⁵

Conclusion: Cook's liberalism

In Cook's social medicine, the agency of each individual member of the population was a matter of central concern for a governing authority. In some contexts, Cook saw justification for directly managing Aboriginal individuals (the removed child, the woman seeking a spouse, the leper) while in other contexts (the exemption of selected 'half-castes', the welcome implications of citizenship through assimilation, the recognition of the consumer's part in controlling lifestyle diseases) he advocated relaxation of controls over Aboriginal people in the interest of public health. In Cook's views on 'Aboriginal rights' we see the intersection of the settler colonial imperative to manage the human effects of dispossession and the public health imperative to bring state responsibility and individual responsibility into effective articulation.

If it is reasonable to see Cook's public health liberalism as contributing to making and remaking a colonial social contract, then we have a fresh perspective on a question raised by Russell McGregor: was Cook's 'breed out the colour' practice an instance of ethnic nationalism? In 'ethnic nationalism', McGregor reminds us, 'blood kinship' is 'a unifying myth of nationhood', and the 'White Australia' policy expressed such thinking and feeling about Australian nationhood: Australians were a community defined by descent from the 'British race'. McGregor presents Cook's authorisation of 'half-caste' marriage to whites and his banning of 'half-caste' marriage to Asians as an instance of an official attempt to absorb Aboriginal people genealogically into the 'white' community of Australian nationhood. For McGregor,

84 Cook, 'Protection', 23.

85 Cook, 'Protection', 24.

while ‘absorptionists’ such as Cook ‘took for granted the dependence of national cohesion on the ties of ethnicity’, they were pragmatic enough to see the necessity for a little ‘racial impurity’.⁸⁶

We agree, but we think this account is incomplete. As McGregor points out, in Federation nationalism ‘blood kinship was not the sole source of national cohesion; *civil* ideals of egalitarianism, democratic rights and social welfare were also potent ingredients’.⁸⁷ Were there not ‘civil’ ideals in Cook’s approach to health? Cook’s vetting of possible husbands for ‘half-caste’ women, Austin explains, included ‘medical examination of both parties ... to show them to be free of communicable diseases’ and ‘a white or “half-caste” husband was then required to contribute for at least twelve months to the Territory medical benefit fund to ensure that his wife had adequate medical attention during pregnancy and to ensure that children received medical “supervision”’.⁸⁸ We suggest that in these tests Cook was applying standards that were not merely ‘ethnic’. The newly formed household’s inclusion in the emerging socio-medical regime was – to Cook – essential, and this he saw as the responsibility of husbands, whatever their ‘race’. Cook wished to establish a certain standard of manly conduct that was not anyone’s ethnic birthright. It was possible for Cook to be pragmatic about ‘racial impurity’ of European/‘half-caste’ unions because trained capacities for self-care and family functioning were as important as the fact that the husband was not Asian: ethnic and civic criteria here combined.

Recapitulating his 1935 policy proposal in 1951, Cook stated 3 goals of ‘native education’ for ‘natives on settlements and missions’:

an appreciation of property and its relation to personal and community wealth, the value of labour, the necessity for production and the virtue of thrift in a concept of personal and social progress ...; full consciousness of and habitual compliance with the principles of personal and communal hygiene ...; to produce for himself the means for gratifying the new wants which settlement contacts have stirred within him.⁸⁹

These are civic norms, not ethnic. Cook’s criteria of national belonging derived from his public health perspective; they were functional standards that valorised certain dispositions towards the body, towards domestic space and towards the community as an ecology of potentially infective and infected organisms. Throughout his career, Cook held to this biological perspective on human society, and this was not the biology of racial determinism but the biology of disease ecology. For him, the

86 McGregor, “‘Breed Out the Colour’”, 296.

87 McGregor, “‘Breed Out the Colour’”, 295, emphasis added.

88 Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home*, 149–50.

89 Cook, ‘Health Problems in Northern Australia’, 7. Cook had formulated similar goals for ‘native education’ in 1935, but at that time he was explicit that they applied only to ‘detrribalized aboriginals’, e.g. those in the vicinity of Darwin and other towns, not to Aboriginal people on pastoral leases or under missionary supervision on reserves (Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 7 October 1935).

characteristics of Aboriginal people that placed them outside Australia as a civic community were not their bloodlines but their historically derived insanitation and their corrigible ignorance of their biological being as Cook conceived it.

To imagine Aboriginal people as aspiring to hygiene was not wishful thinking. A petition to the Northern Territory Administration from Mudburra and Djingili people living on Newcastle Waters Station on 7 September 1952, signed (mostly with crosses) by over 60 people, asked:

that the following facilities be established at our camp: (1) Water laid from the Newcastle Waters Town Supply to a central point at the camp (distance approx. 1 and ¼ miles; (2) 2 shower huts be provided with 2 showers in each hut: 1 set for males 1 set for females; (3) Lavatory accommodation be provided for male and female residents. Your assistance that our tribe will not be disbanded would be appreciated.⁹⁰

How such a ‘tribe’ could figure in the Australian community imagined by assimilationists such as Cook is not clear, but we can be confident that Cook would have been encouraged by this demand for taps, toilets and showers. By 1955, Cook was explicitly linking disease control and civic membership, but the link had been there since 1927 when he began to administer the Northern Territory as a space of problematic hygiene.

Appendix: Cook’s views on sterilisation

Cook proposed to the Administrator of the Northern Territory on 30 March 1933 that certain people be sterilised. The memorandum is available online, so readers may wish use it as a basis for evaluating how 2 historians – Samia Hossain and Andrew Markus – have read it.⁹¹

Hossain begins with the observation that ‘it is unclear’ whether what worried Cook was ‘Aboriginal-ness or mental defectiveness’ being ‘passed on to the next generation’.⁹² Cook’s words are crystal clear: his stated concern was a tiny subset of the Aboriginal population: ‘congenital idiots and other mentally defective children’.⁹³ Hossain’s reading of Cook’s policies and practices suggests a link between 2 concerns of Cook: managing the sexual activity of mentally defective people, and optimising the social benefits (as Cook saw them) of miscegenation. Thus, she suggests that Cook wished to intervene in Aboriginal female reproductive behaviour in a variety of ways: ‘The Aboriginal women who could not be enlisted in his project to “breed out

90 National Australian Archives, NT Region CRS F1 52/463 (reproduced in facsimile by Wolfe, *Crossed Tracks*, 51).

91 NAA A1, 1933/3589, recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=45528.

92 Hossain, ‘Norman Haire and Cecil Cook’, 457.

93 Cecil Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 30 March 1933, NAA A1, 1933/3589.

the colour⁹⁴ Cook wanted to render sterile'.⁹⁴ She presents sterilisation and marital supervision as alternative tactics in Cook's overall strategy of 'colonising Aboriginal women's bodies, through the institution of marriage, to produce babies that would be whiter with every generation'.⁹⁵ We see it differently. Cook had an idea of a good family unit and he did not see how a biological parent (male or female) who was a 'congenital idiot' could be an effective parent of a child who was likely to have inherited his/her affliction. Indeed, when Cook's memorandum is read accurately, it reveals a bureaucrat seeking to minimise the restriction on the liberty of persons whose congenital mental deficiency made responsible sexuality and parenting very unlikely.

Markus represents Cook as suggesting to the administrator that:

detaining such individuals in institutions was necessary to prevent 'propagation of type'; the alternative was a 'minor operation directed towards the sterilization of the individual', who could then be granted freedom: 'there would be no reason whatever for preventing the child's return to complete liberty with the aboriginals if such a course seemed otherwise desirable in any particular instance'. The operation and subsequent returning of the child to its mother would also result in considerable savings to the government. Cook suggested that power to order sterilisation could be given to the Chief Protector or, if this was inadvisable, then to a tribunal.⁹⁶

The problems in Markus's paraphrase begin with the fact that Cook presented 4, not 2, possible solutions to the problem that he has described: removal to a southern institution (unsterilised); permanent detention in Kahlin Compound (unsterilised); release to the Aboriginal camps (unsterilised); minimal or no supervision (if sterilised). Markus omits that Cook commended as the most humane (if probably costly) solution not sterilisation but transfer to 'a southern institution devoted to the care of cases of this nature'.⁹⁷ Anticipating that the Commonwealth would not endorse his recommendation, Cook then considered 2 ways that the Northern Territory Administration could continue its oversight: with or without surgical sterilisation. Without sterilisation 'undue' restraint by the Aboriginal compound would be necessary; with sterilisation, little or no restraint within the compound would be necessary, or perhaps the sterilised person would not have to be in custody at all. We may infer that Cook saw ethical significance in the distinction between more restraint, less restraint and no restraint. To minimise restraint was his reason for suggesting sterilisation of children whose prognosis seemed to rule out (what he considered to be) responsible adulthood. By writing as if Cook presented only 2 options – permanent detention of the unsterilised 'idiot' or freeing the mentally

⁹⁴ Hossain, 'Norman Haire and Cecil Cook', 458.

⁹⁵ Hossain, 'Norman Haire and Cecil Cook', 456–57.

⁹⁶ Markus, *Governing Savages*, 101.

⁹⁷ Cook, Memorandum to Administrator, 30 March 1933, NAA A1, 1933/3589.

incompetent child/youth after sterilisation – Markus is unable to convey that in his canvassing of 4 options Cook was seeking the best way to reconcile liberty with risk management.⁹⁸

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98 Gray (*Brass Discs*, 72) relies on Markus’s account.

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